

Age-Friendly Heritage Tourism: Examining the Relationships between the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the Behavioral Intention of Active Older Adult Visitors in Pingyao Ancient City, China

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ABSTRACT

Population ageing is one of the most significant demographic transformations worldwide, increasing demand for age-friendly tourism and creating new challenges for heritage destination management. Although previous studies have examined age-friendly tourism, heritage tourism, and destination marketing, limited empirical research has investigated how the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix are collectively associated with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors. This study examines these relationships in Pingyao Ancient City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in China, from the perspective of age-friendly heritage tourism.

A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted using data collected from 416 active older adult visitors aged 55 years and above through purposive and stratified random sampling. The questionnaire was adapted from validated measurement scales, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, normality tests, and Spearman's rank correlation analysis.

The findings revealed that all seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix were positively and significantly associated with behavioral intention. The service marketing dimensions (People, Process, and Physical Evidence) demonstrated the strongest associations, followed by the marketing communication and distribution dimensions (Promotion and Place), whereas Product and Price showed comparatively lower, although still strong, associations. Based on these findings, the study develops an Integrated Theoretical Framework for Age-friendly Heritage Tourism that organizes the seven dimensions into three complementary groups within an integrated marketing strategy.

This study contributes by providing a new theoretical organization and interpretation of the existing 7Ps Marketing Mix based on empirical evidence from age-friendly heritage tourism. The developed framework extends the application of the 7Ps Marketing Mix to age-friendly heritage tourism and provides evidence-based managerial guidance for heritage destination managers in designing integrated marketing strategies that better address the needs and expectations of active older adult visitors while supporting the sustainable conservation and management of heritage destinations.

Keywords: Age-friendly heritage tourism; 7Ps Marketing Mix; behavioral intention; active older adult visitors; heritage destination marketing; integrated theoretical framework.

INTRODUCTION

Population Ageing and Age-friendly Heritage Tourism

Population ageing has become one of the most significant demographic transformations of the twenty-first century, fundamentally reshaping patterns of consumption, leisure, and tourism demand worldwide (Wilmoth et al., 2023). In China, this transformation is particularly pronounced. By the end of 2023, the population aged 60 years and above had reached nearly 297 million, accounting for 21.1% of the national population, and is projected to exceed 400 million by 2035, marking the country's transition into a deeply aged society. As this demographic shift accelerates, older adults have become one of the fastest-growing and most influential

segments of the domestic tourism market. Recent industry reports indicate that middle-aged and older travelers account for nearly 40% of China's domestic tourists, while tourism demand among individuals aged 55 years and above has increased substantially in recent years (China Tourism Academy, 2024). The China Tourism Academy further projects that the number of active senior travelers will exceed 100 million, with the silver tourism market expected to generate approximately RMB 1 trillion annually. These developments indicate that senior tourism has evolved from a niche market into an increasingly important driver of China's tourism economy. Consequently, tourism destinations are expected not only to attract older visitors but also to provide accessible, safe, inclusive, and experience-oriented environments that accommodate their physical, psychological, and social needs. Against this background, developing age-friendly tourism has become both a practical priority for destination management and an important research agenda in tourism studies (Wen et al., 2026).

Heritage tourism provides a particularly important context for advancing age-friendly tourism because heritage destinations must balance the preservation of cultural authenticity with the delivery of high-quality visitor experiences. Unlike purpose-built tourism attractions, historic destinations are often constrained by conservation regulations, traditional urban layouts, and ageing infrastructure, making it more challenging to improve accessibility and service quality for older visitors. As population ageing reshapes tourism demand, heritage destination managers face increasing pressure to create environments that are safe, accessible, easy to navigate, comfortable, and culturally engaging without compromising the integrity of heritage resources.

In this study, active older adults refer to individuals aged 55 years and above who remain socially engaged and actively participate in leisure and tourism activities (Lee et al., 2023). The age threshold of 55 years was adopted by considering both China's institutional context and the characteristics of its rapidly expanding silver tourism market. Historically, this age has represented an important transition into later adulthood within China's retirement system, while it also corresponds to one of the fastest-growing segments of the country's domestic tourism market (China Tourism Academy, 2024). Accordingly, active older adult visitors refer to active older adults who visit heritage destinations. As one of China's best-preserved UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Pingyao Ancient City provides an appropriate empirical setting for examining how heritage destinations can respond to the needs of this growing visitor segment through age-friendly tourism development.

Research Background and Gap

Existing research has increasingly recognized the importance of age-friendly tourism in response to global population ageing. Previous studies have consistently shown that older tourists differ from other market segments in terms of travel motivations, destination preferences, service expectations, accessibility requirements, and perceived travel risks. These characteristics highlight the need for tourism destinations to provide inclusive environments, accessible facilities, personalized services, and meaningful travel experiences that enhance older adults' quality of life (Liew et al., 2021; World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

Within the broader tourism literature, heritage tourism has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Previous research has primarily focused on heritage conservation, destination competitiveness, visitor experience, cultural authenticity, and sustainable destination management. Although these studies have generated valuable insights into heritage destination development, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to how heritage destinations can strategically respond to the rapidly growing senior tourism market through integrated marketing approaches.

At the same time, the 7Ps Marketing Mix has been widely adopted as a comprehensive framework for understanding tourism marketing and service delivery. Compared with the traditional 4Ps model, the 7Ps framework incorporates three additional service-oriented dimensions—People, Process, and Physical Evidence—thereby providing a more comprehensive perspective for understanding tourism experiences, which are inherently service-based (Booms & Bitner, 1981; Kotler et al., 2022). Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that these seven marketing dimensions are collectively associated with tourist satisfaction, destination image, and behavioral intention across a variety of tourism contexts. However, relatively little empirical evidence is available regarding how the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix are collectively associated with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors within the context of age-friendly heritage tourism.

These observations reveal several important theoretical and practical gaps. First, although age-friendly tourism has received increasing scholarly attention, previous studies have primarily emphasized accessibility, service quality, and the travel experiences of older adults, while giving comparatively limited attention to the strategic role of destination marketing in supporting age-friendly tourism development (Le Serre et al., 2017; WHO, 2023). Second, heritage tourism research has largely concentrated on heritage conservation, authenticity, visitor management, and destination sustainability, with relatively limited investigation into how marketing strategies can effectively respond to the evolving needs, travel preferences, and behavioral characteristics of active older adult visitors. Third, although the 7Ps Marketing Mix has been extensively applied in tourism marketing research, empirical evidence regarding how its seven dimensions are collectively associated with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors in heritage destinations remains limited, particularly within the Chinese context (Booms et al., 1981; Kotler et al., 2022). Consequently, heritage destination managers continue to lack empirically grounded guidance for prioritizing marketing resources, improving service delivery, and developing age-friendly marketing strategies...

Research Purpose and Contributions

To address the research gaps identified above, this study adopts the 7Ps Marketing Mix as the analytical framework for examining age-friendly heritage tourism. The 7Ps framework provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding tourism experiences by integrating both traditional marketing elements and service-oriented dimensions, making it particularly suitable for heritage destinations where visitor experiences are affected not only by tourism products and promotional activities but also by service interactions, accessibility, environmental quality, and operational processes (Booms & Bitner, 1981; Kotler et al., 2022). Accordingly, this study employs the 7Ps Marketing Mix not merely as a marketing framework but as an analytical lens for understanding how heritage destinations can respond more effectively to the opportunities and challenges arising from population ageing.

Against this background, this study examines the relationships between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors to Pingyao Ancient City from the perspective of age-friendly heritage tourism. In this study, behavioral intention is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct reflecting visitors' future behavioral responses toward an age-friendly heritage destination. It is operationalized through four constructs: tourist satisfaction (TS), likelihood of returning or recommending (LRR), perceived value for money (PVM), and overall travel experience (OTE).

By integrating age-friendly heritage tourism, heritage destination marketing, and behavioral intention into a unified analytical perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on tourism marketing and population ageing through the development of an Integrated Theoretical Framework for Age-friendly Heritage Tourism. The study contributes not by introducing additional marketing dimensions, but by providing a new theoretical organization and interpretation of the existing 7Ps Marketing Mix based on empirical evidence from age-friendly heritage tourism. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the developed framework provides evidence-based managerial guidance for heritage destination managers in developing integrated marketing strategies that enhance the travel experiences of active older adult visitors while supporting the sustainable conservation and management of heritage destinations.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section describes the research methodology, followed by the presentation of the empirical findings. The subsequent sections discuss the results, outline the theoretical and practical implications, and conclude with the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors to Pingyao Ancient City. This design enabled the systematic measurement of observable variables and the examination of relationships among constructs using statistical techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from respondents at a single point in time. This design was particularly suitable for collecting data from active older adult visitors during their visits to Pingyao Ancient City, allowing the study to capture their evaluations under actual travel conditions.

Guided by the concept of age-friendly heritage tourism, this study adopted an explanatory research approach to investigate the relationships between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors. The findings provide empirical evidence to support the development of an Integrated Theoretical Framework for Age-friendly Heritage Tourism.

The study employed a structured questionnaire to obtain standardized responses from active older adult visitors. The resulting data-set was subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank correlation analysis to examine the relationships among the study variables (Hair et al., 2019).

Study Site

Pingyao Ancient City, located in Shanxi Province in northern China, was selected as the study site because it is one of the country's best-preserved historic cities and has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1997 (UNESCO, 2025). Renowned for its original urban layout, traditional courtyard architecture, commercial streets, and defensive city walls dating from the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Pingyao is one of China's most representative heritage tourism destinations and attracts substantial numbers of domestic and international visitors each year, providing an appropriate setting for tourism research (Shao & Zhou, 2025).

The selection of Pingyao was aligned with the objectives of this study. As a mature heritage tourism destination, the city integrates heritage conservation, tourism services, commercial activities, and visitor management within a compact historic environment. These characteristics enable visitors to experience all seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix, including tourism products, pricing, accessibility, promotional activities, service encounters, operational processes, and the physical environment. Consequently, Pingyao provides an appropriate context for examining the relationships between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors.

Pingyao is also well suited to research on age-friendly heritage tourism. As population aging increases worldwide, heritage destinations are expected to provide tourism environments that are safe, accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of older adults (Patterson, I., & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023; Lee, 2026). As an established heritage destination with a considerable proportion of middle-aged and active older adult visitors, Pingyao faces the practical challenge of balancing heritage conservation with service quality and visitor accessibility. Examining how active older adult visitors perceive destination marketing dimensions provides valuable evidence for improving destination management and supporting age-friendly heritage tourism.

Although the empirical investigation was conducted in Pingyao Ancient City, the study addresses broader issues concerning heritage destination marketing in aging societies. Many heritage destinations face similar challenges in enhancing active older adult visitors' experiences while safeguarding cultural authenticity. Therefore, the findings are expected to contribute not only to the sustainable development of Pingyao but also to the development of age-friendly marketing strategies for comparable heritage tourism destinations.

Sampling Strategy

A two-stage sampling strategy was employed to recruit active older adult visitors to Pingyao Ancient City. The first stage involved purposive sampling to identify respondents who met the study's eligibility criteria, followed by stratified random sampling to improve the representativeness of the final sample.

Purposive sampling was adopted to ensure that respondents were directly relevant to the research objectives. Eligible participants were required to (1) be 55 years of age or older, (2) have visited Pingyao Ancient City during the survey period, (3) possess sufficient cognitive ability to complete the questionnaire independently, and (4) voluntarily agree to participate in the study. The age criterion was consistent with the definition of active

older adults adopted in this study and reflected an important segment of China's rapidly expanding silver tourism market (Le Serre et al., 2017; China Tourism Academy, 2024).

Following the identification of eligible respondents, stratified random sampling was employed to improve sample representativeness. Respondents were stratified according to age group, gender, educational attainment, monthly income, travel companion, and travel frequency, and participants within each stratum were randomly invited to complete the questionnaire.

The required sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations. According to official statistics published by the Pingyao County Tourism Bureau, Pingyao received approximately 10 million tourist visits in 2023, indicating that the target population was sufficiently large to justify the use of Cochran's formula. At a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the minimum recommended sample size was 385 respondents (Cochran, 1977). A total of 416 valid questionnaires were collected and retained for analysis, exceeding the recommended minimum sample size.

Questionnaire Development and Measurement

The questionnaire was developed based on the conceptual framework of this study to examine the relationships between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors. Rather than developing a new instrument, the questionnaire was adapted from validated measurement scales in tourism marketing, destination management, service marketing, and age-friendly tourism. Minor revisions were made to reflect the characteristics of heritage tourism in Pingyao while preserving the original conceptual meanings of the constructs.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section collected respondents' demographic information, including age, gender, educational attainment, monthly income, travel frequency, travel duration, and travel companion.

The second section measured the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix—Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence. Measurement items were adapted from established studies on the extended marketing mix, service quality, destination marketing, and age-friendly tourism (Booms & Bitner, 1981; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Kotler et al., 2022; Le Serre et al., 2017), with minor contextual modifications for the heritage tourism setting of Pingyao Ancient City.

The third section measured respondents' behavioral intention toward Pingyao as an age-friendly heritage destination. The measurement items were adapted from established behavioral intention scales in tourism research and destination loyalty studies (Ajzen, 1991; Chen & Tsai, 2007).

To establish content validity, the preliminary questionnaire was reviewed by five experts in tourism management, marketing, and research methodology. Their comments were incorporated to improve the relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness of the measurement items. The revised questionnaire was subsequently pilot-tested with respondents who shared characteristics similar to those of the target population, and minor revisions were made before the formal survey.

Because the survey was administered to Chinese respondents, the questionnaire was prepared in Chinese. A translation and back-translation procedure was employed to ensure semantic equivalence between the English and Chinese versions and to minimize potential translation bias.

All measurement items were assessed using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores indicating more favorable evaluations of destination marketing attributes and stronger behavioral intention. The internal consistency of the measurement scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. A test of normality was subsequently conducted to determine the appropriate statistical method for data analysis. As the data did not satisfy the assumption of normality, Spearman's rank correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships among the study variables.

Data Collection

Data were collected from June to September 2025 in Pingyao Ancient City, Shanxi Province, China, using a mixed-mode survey approach that combined online and paper-based questionnaires. The target population comprised active older adult visitors aged 55 years and above who visited Pingyao Ancient City during the data collection period. Prior to data collection, permission was obtained from the relevant tourism authorities and stakeholders.

To improve sample coverage, questionnaires were distributed through both online and offline channels. Online questionnaires were disseminated via email and tourism-related social media platforms, while paper-based questionnaires were administered on-site to eligible visitors in Pingyao Ancient City. This mixed-mode approach accommodated different levels of digital literacy and encouraged participation among respondents who preferred face-to-face communication.

Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to participation. Each questionnaire required approximately 15 minutes to complete, and small appreciation incentives were provided upon completion.

After data collection, all returned questionnaires were screened for completeness and consistency. Incomplete or invalid responses were excluded, and the remaining questionnaires were coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27) for analysis. A total of 416 valid questionnaires were retained for the final analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The normality of the data was then evaluated using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests to determine the appropriate statistical technique for inferential analysis. Because the data did not satisfy the assumption of normality, Spearman's rank correlation analysis (Spearman's rho) was employed to examine the relationships between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors. Statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. A total of 416 active older adult visitors participated in the survey. The sample represented a range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, including age, gender, travel frequency, preferred travel companion, educational attainment, and monthly income. As shown in Table 1, the largest proportion of respondents were aged 55–60 years, female, traveled once per year, preferred traveling with family or friends, and reported monthly incomes below RMB 5,000.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 416)

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Age	55–60 years	297	71.4
	61–65 years	63	15.1
	66–70 years	22	5.3

	71 years and Above	34	8.2
Gender	Male	145	34.9
	Female	232	55.8
	Prefer not to say	39	9.4
Annual Travel Frequency	Once a year	274	65.9
	Twice a year	77	18.5
	More than twice a year	65	15.6
Preferred Travel Companion	Solo	54	13.0
	Partner	91	21.9
	Family/Friends	226	54.3
	Organized group	45	10.8
Educational Attainment	Below high school	127	30.5
	High school	96	23.1
	Vocational/Technical	75	18.0
	Bachelor's degree	100	24.0
	Graduate school	18	4.3
Monthly Income (RMB)	Below RMB 3,000	171	41.1
	RMB 3,000–5,000	156	37.5
	RMB 5,000–7,000	55	13.2
	RMB 7,000 and above	34	8.2

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. As presented in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.995 for the 7Ps Marketing Mix construct and 0.996 for the Behavioral Intention construct, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis of the Measurement Scales

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
7Ps Marketing Mix	32	0.995
Behavioral Intention	16	0.996

Relationships Between the 7Ps Marketing Mix and Behavioral Intention

To examine the relationships between the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors, Spearman's rank correlation analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 3. All seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix were positively and significantly associated with the four dimensions of behavioral intention—tourist satisfaction, likelihood of returning or recommending, perceived value for money, and overall travel experience ($p < .001$). Correlation coefficients ranged from 0.899 to 0.964.

Table 3. Spearman's Rank Correlation between the 7Ps Marketing Mix and behavioral Intention Dimensions (N = 416)

7Ps Marketing Mix Dimension	TS	LRR	PVM	OTE	Significance
Product	.908**	.906**	.899**	.903**	< .001
Price	.899**	.911**	.901**	.900**	< .001
Place	.914**	.917**	.916**	.916**	< .001
Promotion	.940**	.930**	.929**	.937**	< .001
People	.964**	.953**	.942**	.958**	< .001
Process	.960**	.943**	.945**	.945**	< .001
Physical Evidence	.952**	.956**	.954**	.955**	< .001

Note. Spearman's rank correlation coefficients are reported. All relationships were statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N = 416. $p < .001$ for all correlations. Data derived from the Spearman's rank correlation analysis.

Among the seven dimensions, People demonstrated the strongest associations with all four behavioral intention dimensions, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.942 to 0.964. Physical Evidence and Process also showed consistently high association, followed by Promotion. Although Product, Price, and Place exhibited comparatively lower correlation coefficients, all remained strongly and positively associated with behavioral intention.

For ease of comparison, Table 4 presents the average correlation coefficients of the seven dimensions across the four behavioral intention measures. As shown in Table 4, People, Physical Evidence, and Process exhibited the strongest overall associations with behavioral intention, whereas Product and Price showed comparatively lower, although still strong, associations.

Table 4. Ranking of the 7Ps Marketing Mix Dimensions According to Their Average Correlation Coefficients with Behavioral Intention

Rank	7Ps Marketing Mix Dimension	Average Correlation Coefficient
1	People	.954
2	Physical Evidence	.954
3	Process	.948
4	Promotion	.934

5	Place	.916
6	Product	.904
7	Price	.903

Note. Average correlation coefficients were calculated by averaging the four Spearman's rank correlation coefficients reported in Table 3. The ranking is intended to provide an overall comparison of the relative strength of the relationships between each 7Ps Marketing Mix dimension and the four behavioral intention dimensions. It does not represent an additional statistical analysis.

DISCUSSION

Service Marketing Dimensions Showing the Strongest Associations with Behavioral Intention

The findings of this study not only indicate that the three service marketing dimensions of the extended 7Ps Marketing Mix—People, Process, and Physical Evidence—were more strongly associated with the behavioral intentions of active older adult visitors than the remaining marketing mix dimensions, but also further support the multidimensional conceptualization of behavioral intention adopted in this study and highlight the importance of service marketing dimensions in understanding the behavioral intentions of active older adult visitors within age-friendly heritage tourism settings.

These findings are consistent with the services marketing framework proposed by Booms and Bitner (1981), which identifies People, Process, and Physical Evidence as essential dimensions of service delivery. Given the intangible and experiential nature of tourism services, the stronger associations observed for these three dimensions suggest that visitors place considerable importance on how tourism services are delivered and experienced rather than on the core tourism product alone. This interpretation is also consistent with the service quality literature, which emphasizes that service encounters and the service environment are closely associated with tourists' evaluations, satisfaction, and subsequent behavioral responses (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Brady & Cronin, 2001).

Among these three dimensions, People demonstrated the strongest associations with behavioral intention, highlighting the central role of front-line employees in shaping older adults' tourism experiences. Compared with younger tourists, active older adult visitors may place greater value on personalized assistance, effective communication, and responsive service because these interactions help reduce uncertainty, enhance confidence, and improve the overall travel experience. This finding is consistent with heritage tourism research showing that high-quality interpersonal interactions contribute positively to visitors' experience quality and future behavioral responses (Zhou & Wang, 2024). It is also aligned with recent research on age-friendly tourism, which emphasizes that responsive, inclusive, and visitor-centered services are fundamental characteristics of age-friendly destinations and contribute to positive tourism experiences among older adults (World Health Organization, 2023; Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023).

The strong association observed for Process further underscores the importance of efficient, well-organized, and reliable service delivery. Smooth reservation procedures, effective visitor management, and consistent service standards may improve visitors' evaluations of tourism experiences. Likewise, the strong association identified for Physical Evidence suggests that visitors rely on tangible cues—including visitor facilities, signage, accessibility, and the physical environment—to evaluate the quality of inherently intangible tourism services. These findings are consistent with the servicescape theory proposed by Bitner (1992) and subsequent tourism studies demonstrating that well-designed service environments are positively associated with visitor satisfaction and behavioral intention (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999). More recent heritage tourism research likewise emphasizes that the quality of heritage settings, aesthetic experiences, and memorable visitor experiences are closely associated with tourists' behavioral intentions (Lee et al., 2025; Mohammad Shafiee et al., 2021).

These findings have important managerial implications for heritage tourism destinations seeking to attract and retain active older adult visitors. Although the present study examined relationships rather than causal effects,

the consistently strong associations observed suggest that strengthening these service marketing dimensions may contribute to more favorable behavioral intentions among active older adult visitors. Rather than relying primarily on promotional activities, destination managers should prioritize employee training, service process standardization, and the continuous improvement of tangible service environments. Particular attention should also be given to designing age-friendly service encounters that enhance accessibility, confidence, and comfort for older visitors. By strengthening these service marketing dimensions, heritage destinations may enhance visitors' positive evaluations and foster favorable behavioral intentions. This recommendation is consistent with previous heritage tourism studies demonstrating that improvements in experience quality, perceived value, and heritage experiential quality are closely associated with stronger behavioral intentions and more positive visitor evaluations (Chen & Chen, 2010; Hussein & Hapsari, 2021).

Marketing Communication and Distribution Dimensions as Complementary Dimensions Associated with Behavioral Intention

The findings of this study indicate that Promotion and Place were positively associated with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors, although these associations were relatively weaker than those observed for the service marketing dimensions. These findings suggest that marketing communication and service distribution function as complementary dimensions within the 7Ps Marketing Mix by supporting active older adult visitors' decision-making before service consumption and contributing to favorable behavioral intention.

A plausible explanation for this finding is that Promotion and Place primarily function during the pre-travel stage, whereas People, Process, and Physical Evidence are more closely associated with visitors' evaluations during service delivery. Promotion and Place facilitate destination awareness, information acquisition, and travel planning before service consumption, while the remaining service marketing dimensions become more salient as visitors interact with employees, service processes, and the physical environment during the tourism experience. This interpretation is consistent with destination marketing theory, which emphasizes that marketing communication and distribution channels support destination choice by facilitating information search and travel planning before consumption (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The present findings are also generally consistent with previous studies reporting positive associations between destination marketing activities and tourists' behavioral intention, although most previous studies have examined individual marketing dimensions rather than their complementary roles within the 7Ps framework.

For active older adult visitors, the relatively weaker associations observed for Promotion and Place may reflect the characteristics of their travel decision-making process. Compared with on-site service experiences, travel planning often requires greater attention to information quality, accessibility, convenience, and service reliability. The present findings suggest that marketing communication and distribution primarily support behavioral intention by facilitating informed travel decisions before the tourism experience begins, rather than through direct interaction during service delivery. This observation provides additional insight into how different marketing dimensions are associated with behavioral intention at different stages of the visitor journey.

The findings further contribute to the understanding of the 7Ps Marketing Mix in heritage tourism by distinguishing between two complementary groups of marketing dimensions. While Promotion and Place primarily support destination awareness and travel planning before service consumption, People, Process, and Physical Evidence are more closely associated with visitors' evaluations during the service experience. This distinction helps explain why the two groups of marketing dimensions demonstrated different levels of association with behavioral intention and provides empirical support for the integrated theoretical framework proposed in this study. Rather than considering the seven marketing dimensions independently, the findings suggest that they operate in complementary ways across different stages of the visitor experience.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that heritage destination managers should integrate effective marketing communication with accessible distribution strategies when designing marketing programs for active older adult visitors. Promotional information should emphasize credibility, clarity, and accessibility, while distribution channels should be convenient, reliable, and easy to navigate throughout the booking process. At the same time, destination managers should recognize that improving communication and distribution alone may not be sufficient to strengthen behavioral intention. Equal attention should be given to service delivery through

high-quality interactions, efficient service processes, and well-maintained physical environments, as these dimensions demonstrated stronger associations with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors.

Product and Price as Fundamental Dimensions of the Marketing Mix

The findings of this study indicate that Product and Price were positively associated with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors, although these associations were relatively weaker than those observed for the service marketing, communication, and distribution dimensions. Nevertheless, the consistently positive associations suggest that both dimensions remain fundamental dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix in the context of heritage tourism.

The relatively weaker associations observed for Product and Price suggest that these dimensions may represent fundamental requirements rather than the primary considerations associated with behavioral intention among active older adult visitors. Once visitors perceive that heritage tourism products meet their expectations and that pricing is acceptable, their subsequent evaluations appear to be more closely associated with the quality of the tourism experience. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Chen and Chen (2010), who reported that perceived value was closely associated with the behavioral intention of heritage tourists. More recent heritage tourism research has similarly emphasized that memorable tourism experiences, visitor engagement, and authenticity are more closely associated with revisit and electronic word-of-mouth intentions than functional destination attributes alone (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

The present findings further suggest that, for active older adult visitors, behavioral intention is associated not only with the core tourism product or its price but also with opportunities to participate, interact, and engage throughout the visitor journey. Hussein and Hapsari (2021) reported that experiential quality was positively associated with visitors' behavioral intention in the context of heritage hospitality, highlighting the importance of the overall tourism experience beyond the core product itself. Similarly, a recent study of Chinese older tourists found that value-related evaluations remained important, while experiential and social value were closely associated with revisit and recommendation intentions among older travelers. These observations are consistent with the present findings, which indicate that Product and Price provide the fundamental value proposition of heritage destinations, whereas experiential and social dimensions appear to be more strongly associated with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

These findings extend the application of the 7Ps Marketing Mix within the heritage tourism context by demonstrating that different marketing dimensions are associated with behavioral intention to different degrees. Rather than diminishing the importance of Product and Price, the findings suggest that these dimensions establish the foundation of active older adult visitors' destination evaluations, while experiential and social dimensions become more salient in shaping favorable behavioral intention among active older adult visitors.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that heritage destination managers should continue to preserve the authenticity, cultural significance, and overall quality of heritage tourism products while adopting pricing strategies that are transparent, reasonable, and aligned with visitors' value expectations. At the same time, greater attention should be directed toward designing engaging active older adult visitors' experiences, facilitating meaningful social interaction, and creating opportunities for active participation throughout their journeys. Integrating high-quality heritage products and appropriate pricing with experience-oriented service delivery may better support favorable behavioral intention among active older adult visitors.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications for age-friendly heritage tourism marketing. From a theoretical perspective, the findings extend the application of the 7Ps Marketing Mix through the development of an Integrated Theoretical Framework for Age-friendly Heritage Tourism (Figure 1). The framework, developed from the empirical findings of this study, provides a more comprehensive interpretation of how the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix are associated with the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors.

Figure 1. Integrated Theoretical Framework for Age-friendly Heritage Tourism: An Interpretation of the Seven Dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix

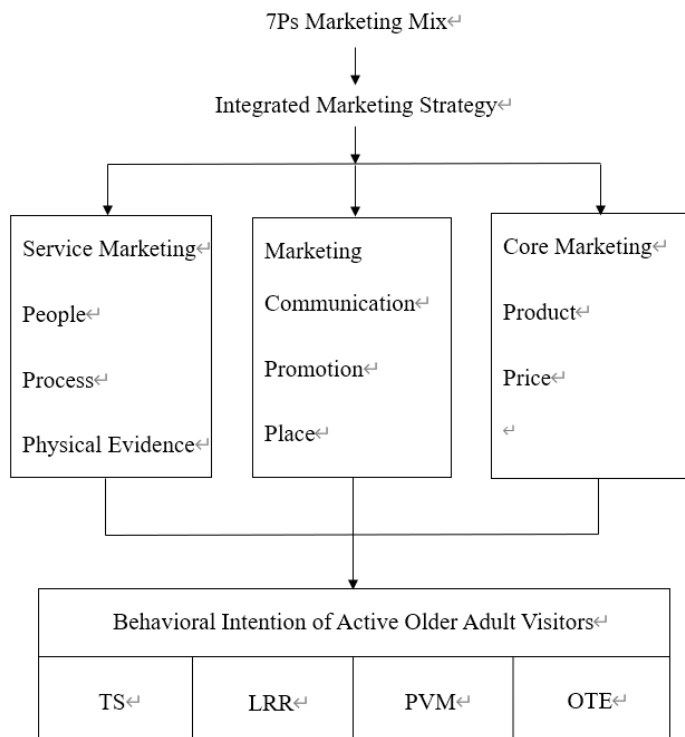


Figure Note. TS = Tourist Satisfaction; LRR = Likelihood of Returning or Recommending; PVM = Perceived Value for Money; and OTE = Overall Travel Experience. The framework, developed from the empirical findings of this study, organizes the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix into three complementary groups within an integrated marketing strategy for age-friendly heritage tourism.

Rather than interpreting the seven marketing dimensions independently, the developed framework organizes them into three complementary groups: service marketing dimensions (People, Process and Physical Evidence), marketing communication and distribution dimensions (Promotion and Place), and core marketing dimensions (Product and Price). Together, these groups represent an integrated marketing strategy in which each performs a distinct yet complementary role. The framework further suggests that these three groups correspond to different stages of the active older adult visitor journey, with the service marketing dimensions shaping the on-site experience, the marketing communication and distribution dimensions supporting pre-visit decision-making, and the core marketing dimensions providing the value proposition underlying destination choice.

This study contributes not by introducing additional marketing dimensions, but by providing a new theoretical organization and interpretation of the existing 7Ps Marketing Mix based on empirical evidence from age-friendly heritage tourism. The developed framework therefore extends the application of the traditional 7Ps Marketing Mix and provides a theoretical foundation for future studies examining integrated marketing strategies for active older adult visitors across different heritage tourism contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that heritage tourism destinations should adopt an integrated marketing strategy rather than focusing on individual marketing dimensions in isolation. Destination managers should coordinate service delivery, marketing communication, distribution channels, product development, and pricing decisions as complementary dimensions of a unified marketing strategy that addresses the needs and expectations of active older adult visitors.

Given that the service marketing dimensions demonstrated the strongest associations with behavioral intention, destination managers should prioritize service quality, service processes, and the physical environment to enhance active older adult visitors' on-site experiences. At the same time, the marketing communication and

distribution dimensions should strengthen destination awareness and travel planning before the visit, while the core marketing dimensions should ensure that tourism products and pricing strategies continue to provide appropriate value for active older adult visitors.

Although this study examined associations rather than causal relationships, the findings provide useful evidence for strategic marketing planning in heritage destinations. By integrating these complementary dimensions into a coherent marketing strategy, destination managers may better respond to the needs of active older adult visitors and support the sustainable development of age-friendly heritage tourism.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and the behavioral intention of active older adult visitors in Pingyao Ancient City, China. The findings revealed that all seven dimensions were positively associated with behavioral intention, with the service marketing dimensions (People, Process, and Physical Evidence) demonstrating the strongest associations. Building upon these findings, this study developed an Integrated Theoretical Framework for Age-friendly Heritage Tourism (Figure 1), which organizes the seven dimensions into three complementary groups and provides an integrated interpretation of the 7Ps Marketing Mix within the context of age-friendly heritage tourism.

This study contributes not by introducing additional marketing dimensions, but by providing a new theoretical organization and interpretation of the existing 7Ps Marketing Mix based on empirical evidence from age-friendly heritage tourism. The findings extend the application of the 7Ps Marketing Mix to age-friendly heritage tourism while offering a practical reference for destination managers seeking to design integrated marketing strategies that better address the needs and expectations of active older adult visitors.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study employed a cross-sectional research design, which enabled the examination of associations between the seven dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and behavioral intention but did not permit causal inference. Second, the study was conducted exclusively in Pingyao Ancient City, a single UNESCO World Heritage Site in China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other heritage destinations and cultural settings. Third, although Spearman's rank correlation analysis was appropriate for examining the relationships among the study variables, it did not assess the relative predictive power or more complex direct, indirect, and mediating relationships among the dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and behavioral intention. Finally, the study focused exclusively on active older adult visitors, and the findings may not be directly applicable to other visitor segments.

Future research may address these limitations by employing longitudinal or mixed-method research designs to provide a deeper understanding of how marketing strategies influence behavioral intention over time. Comparative studies involving multiple heritage destinations across different countries and cultural contexts would further enhance the generalizability and cross-cultural relevance of the findings. In addition, future studies may employ more advanced multivariate analytical techniques, such as structural equation modeling (SEM), to examine the direct, indirect, and mediating relationships among the dimensions of the 7Ps Marketing Mix and behavioral intention. Further validation of the proposed Integrated Theoretical Framework for Age-friendly Heritage Tourism across different tourism settings and visitor populations would also strengthen its broader theoretical and practical applicability.

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